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Governor Doyle Announces Directive to Reduce Mercury Emissions by 90%

Also Calls for Ban on Certain Mercury Products

Governor Jim Doyle today directed the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to develop a rule achieving a 90% reduction of mercury emissions from coal-fired power plants – the single largest source of mercury to Wisconsin lakes and rivers – through rules and incentives. The Governor also called for a ban on and increased recycling of certain mercury products such as mercury thermometers and dental products.

"Wisconsin must continue to be a leader in controlling mercury emissions so we can protect our children, pregnant women and others from the devastating impacts of mercury pollution," Governor Doyle said. "Mercury is a real threat not only to our rivers and lakes but also to the health of our citizens. This tough standard will ensure that Wisconsin remains at the forefront of controlling this environmental hazard."

Governor Doyle directed the Department of Natural Resources to achieve a 90% reduction in mercury emissions from coal-fired power plants through rules and incentives. The DNR is to work with the utilities and environmental and conservation groups to develop the rule as soon as possible. Coal-fired power plants contribute over 40% of the annual mercury emissions within the state. Controlling these mercury emissions is necessary to protect public health and the environment over the long-term.

The Governor also called for ban on mercury in products such as utility lights in car trunks, thermostats, barometers and thermometers and for the recycling of mercury thermostats and mercury-containing amalgam from dental offices. He also called for a ban of mercury products in schools. The Governor directed the DNR to work with state legislators to enact the comprehensive ban.

"A broken mercury fever thermometer or spilled liquid mercury poses an unnecessary threat to children in our homes and schools," Governor Doyle added.

When mercury containing products are disposed with other solid waste, mercury can seep into the soil and eventually the groundwater. In Wisconsin, it is estimated that 6,600 pounds of mercury are placed into solid waste facilities each year.

Fish consumption is the primary pathway of human exposure to mercury. Currently, nearly all of Wisconsin's lakes, rivers and streams are under a mercury advisory to limit the consumption of fish.

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Women of child-bearing age and children under the age of 15 are advised not to eat large sport fish – walleye, northern pike, and bass – more than once a month and panfish – bluegill and crappie – more than once a week. Men are warned not to eat walleye and northern pike more than once a week.

In addition to the health risks that mercury pollution poses, it also has an economic impact because of reduced recreation and tourism. The sport fishing industry accounts for nearly 30,000 jobs and generates \$2.3 billion statewide. Among states, Wisconsin ranks second in the number of fishing licenses sold to nonresidents.